

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 999

CG 028 458

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TITLE Race and Gender Differences in Pledging Attitudes.
PUB DATE 1995-02-00
NOTE 31p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; Cultural Differences; *Fraternities;
Higher Education; *Racial Differences; Role of Education;
School Responsibility; *Sex Differences; *Sororities;
*Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Pledging (Fraternities Sororities)

ABSTRACT

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Running head: RACE AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PLEDGING

Race and Gender Differences in Pledging Attitudes

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Abstract

Attitudes toward pledging among college students were examined to determine if attitudes differed according to race or gender. Participants were surveyed at two locations including attendees from a Greek national convention and students enrolled at a large urban college campus. Results showed a significant main effect for race and gender but failed to find an interaction effect. Participants differed in their perceptions of the process known as pledging. These findings suggest the importance of helping educate college organizations about their roles and responsibilities for pledging. The way in which that education about pledging occurs may take different forms given cultural and gender differences in perception about the pledging process.

Race and Gender Differences in Pledging Attitudes

While college and universities have involved fraternities and sororities for over 200 years (Hunt & Rent, 1994), little is known about their time honored practice of entry known as pledging. To date, research concerning students' attitudes about experiences of pledging are not clear. Rarely understood as an essential college student developmental task, the question may be asked, of what importance is pledging to the college experience. Pledging can be viewed as a rite of passage, a ritual that is important for marking the successful passage from one position in the social structure to another (van Gennep, cited in Butler & Glennen, 1991). Why is it important for colleges and their students to make sense of this unique rite of passage and place of entry into college organizations including fraternities, sororities, and other similar social groups?

Recent years have witnessed an unfortunate rash of pledging accidents, assaults, and even deaths at the hands of fellow students (Buchanan, 1982; Collision, 1988; Shea, 1994). College administrators, student development educators, and student leaders all decry these incidents but none can ignore them. For this reason, understanding how the process of pledging occurs helps students make better choices about their participation in a social organization which requires pledging activities as an entry requirement. Moreover, since thousands of students go through some form of pledging on college campuses each year,

understanding how pledging influences a student's growth and development seems an important and necessary research endeavor.

Pledging may be described as the process of becoming a member of a fraternity or sorority. College organizations including social and academic sororities and fraternities, honorary societies, and even residence hall groups utilize formal or informal mechanisms to bring new members into the organization. Pledging activities may include a range of events from community service projects to learning fraternity and sorority history, as well as performing tasks or favors for Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Pledging activities can take only a few hours or extend several weeks in duration. In general, pledging seeks to acquaint or orient the prospective new member as to the rules, cultures, and beliefs of the group or organization. Through the process of pledging, the pledgee becomes acquainted with the organization and its various customs. In addition, pledging gives an organization or group an opportunity to screen or select its most attractive or desirable "recruits." Through pledging, an organization may determine which recruit is the most committed to membership. As such, an organization may create activities that serve to test or challenge a recruit's commitment to the prospective group. It is within this context that the potential for harm evolves. If an organization elects to test prospective members through the use of physical activity or the assessment of psychological acumen,

then the possibility of doing harm to the recruit intensifies. Whenever such physical or psychological activity is recklessly administered, such actions may constitute a form of abuse known as hazing.

A third and final role for pledging is that of facilitating entry and the assignment of organizational tasks upon entry. Pledging helps a recruit and the organization to identify service roles and tasks in which the student will become involved after full acceptance into the group. Leadership skills, volunteer service, and related skills are identified during the pledging process.

In summary, pledging is a process or set of activities designed to acquaint the recruit with the prospective organization or group. The set of activities that comprise pledging are not uniformly determined. There is considerable variation from group to group and across recruits. While the process is perceived to be developmental in nature, not all pledging activities are beneficial. Highly publicized pledging events which have led to serious injury or death are few, in comparison to the thousands who pledge each year. Nonetheless, these harmful activities are the focus of legal actions (Meyer, 1986; Richmond, 1989) and serve to cloud understanding about pledging. For this reason, a study was undertaken to measure attitudes toward pledging among college students and to determine whether there are differences between black and white, male and

female, Greek respondents. Three research questions were important to this investigation. (1) Are there differences between Black and White college students in their attitudes toward pledging? (2) Do men and women have different attitudes toward pledging? (3) How do race and gender interact to influence attitudes toward pledging?

Research on Greek affiliation

Several researchers have hypothesized that Greek membership positively impacts values and psychosocial, identity and moral reasoning development (Hughes & Winston, 1987; Hunt & Rent, 1994; Winston & Saunders, 1987). However, other studies have suggested that Greek affiliation can restrict the moral reasoning abilities of Greek members (Kilgannon & Erwin, 1992; Sanders, 1990). Kilgannon & Erwin (1992) conducted a 2 year longitudinal study investigating the impact of Greek affiliation on the development of student identity and moral reasoning. Greek men scored lower on average in the confidence component of identity development than did Greek women and non-Greek men and women. Non-Greek women scored higher on average in moral reasoning than did Greek men and women and non-Greek men.

Hunt & Rent (1990) found a positive relationship between a Greek member's involvement and certain aspects of psychosocial development. They found that involvement in a fraternity and sorority and fraternal participation with other organized campus activities was significantly related to establishing and

clarifying purpose, developing mature interpersonal relationships, and establishing intimacy (Hunt & Rent, 1990).

Still other studies have examined the relationship between Greek membership and interpersonal values (Astin, 1977; Bohrnstedt, 1969). Hughes & Winston (1987) noted that fraternity membership may impede or slow the developmental process of independence and freedom in interpersonal relationships. Pledges become more homogenous or similar to each other and value leadership more highly than do independents. Some studies examine the relationship between Greek membership and changes in values (Wilder, Hoyt, Doren, Hauck, & Zettle, 1978; Wilder, Hoyt, Shuster, Wilder, and Carney, 1986). Hughes & Winston (1987) have found that fraternity affiliation did not differentially affect members' values or rate of change in values.

Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (1996) conducted a longitudinal study on the cognitive effects of Greek affiliation on first year college students. They found that joining a fraternity during the first year of college has a significant negative impact on four cognitive outcomes (reading comprehension, mathematics, critical thinking, and composite cognitive achievement) for men. For women, joining a sorority during the first year of college also had a negative impact on cognitive development, but only the effects for reading comprehension and composite achievement were statistically significant. However, additional results of their analysis

indicated that there were dramatic differences of fraternity membership on cognitive effects for White men and men of color. Pascerella et al (1995) found that fraternity membership had a modest positive influence for men of color on all four cognitive outcomes.

In summary, while some of the literature seems to suggest that Greek affiliation has negative effects on moral reasoning, developmental tasks of independence, and cognitive outcomes, Pascerella et al's study suggests that Greek affiliation may have positive differential effects on students based on race and gender.

There has been much publicity surrounding hazing incidents during pledging (Buchanan, 1982; Collison, 1988; Curry, 1989; Meyer, 1986; Reese, 1993; Richmond, 1987, 1989; Rodriguez, 1995). Deaths due to hazing incidents are a concern for colleges and their student organizations. Hazing incidents reported in many Greek organizations range from alcohol abuse (Tampke, 1990) to physical abuse (Shea, 1994). Despite these findings, little is known about the psychological characteristics (i.e. attitudes) of those individuals who commit hazing acts (Baier & Williams, 1983).

The present study is designed to measure attitudes toward pledging among college students. A second purpose is to determine whether there are any differences in attitudes between Black and White, male and female Greek college students. There were three

hypotheses tested in this study. First, there will be no significant difference in attitudes toward pledging between Black and White college students. Second, there will be no significant difference in attitudes toward pledging between male and female college students. Third, there will not be a significant interaction effect of race and gender in attitudes toward pledging.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were undergraduate students chosen from two sources. College students at a large urban university and conference attendees at Greek regional and national conferences were recruited for this study. The sample consisted of 280 students, 151 women and 127 men. Two respondents did not indicate gender. There were 143 Black respondents and 121 White respondents. The numbers of other racial/ethnic groups were too small to report. In addition, 229 were Greek while 49 were non-Greek. Two respondents did not indicate Greek/non-Greek status. Non-Greeks were recruited as a potential moderator variable in the analysis.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used to measure pledging and hazing attitudes was the Survey of Attitudes About Pledging (SAAP), an instrument especially designed for this study (Cokley, 1992). It is a 32 item, 5-point Likert scale. A rating of 1 indicates

strong disagreement with the statement while a rating of 5 indicates strong agreement with the statement. The instrument produces a score where the larger numbers (4 and 5) represent support for pledging and the smaller numbers (1 and 2) represent lack of support for pledging. Items for this instrument were obtained from (1) a review of the literature concerning pledging and hazing, and (2) interviews with both Greek and non-Greek students. Items within the survey addressed such issues as level of difficulty of pledging, physical and mental requirements, and dressing alike. (see Appendix A for sample survey items). Five key terms were defined on the survey to ensure that all respondents had the same working knowledge of the terms. These terms included fraternity/sorority, Greek, pledgee, pledge, and Big Brother/Big Sister. (see Appendix B for definitions). The initial content validity was determined by an administrator, a student affairs professional, and a faculty person, as well as an additional faculty expert in instrument development. The administrator is the Assistant Dean of Students and Research, while the student affairs professional is the director of Greek Affairs. One faculty member has expertise in the area of student development in higher education, while the other faculty expert in instrument development is the co-author of the Coping Resources Inventory for Stress (CRIS) (Matheny, Curlette, Aycock, Pugh & Taylor, 1987) and the Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success (BASIS-A) (Kern, Wheeler &

Curlette, 1993). Comments from these experts were used to screen items for ambiguity.

There were two issues that had to be addressed before constructing the survey instrument. First, hazing needed to be operationally defined. For this study, hazing is defined as any act which requires the physical, mental, or public degradation of an individual who desires membership into an organization. Second, because of the emotionally charged and pejorative nature of the word, hazing was intentionally not defined on the survey. It was used only once on the survey. This action was done to manage any socially desirable response bias by respondents. Items on the survey that characterized the acts of hazing were consistent with the operational definition of hazing without actually using the word itself.

Procedure

The surveys were distributed and collected by two Greek Affairs professionals in attendance at the Greek conferences. Participants were given a brief description of the study, informed that participation was voluntary, and given instructions on completing the survey. Consent forms were then distributed. Data were collected from participants at the beginning of presentations given by the Greek Affairs professionals. In addition, one of the authors distributed and collected the surveys at various Greek and non-Greek student meetings at the public southeastern university. The author also gave a brief

description of the study, informed that participation was voluntary, and gave instructions on completing the survey. Consent forms were then distributed, and upon collection the surveys were distributed.

Data Analysis & Results

An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. Because of unequal group sizes, the homogeneity of variance assumption was tested using Cochran's C test. The degree of heterogeneity was not significant ($F=.272$, $df=4,62$, $p > .05$), thus indicating equal variances. A two-way factorial ANOVA was employed to determine any significant main effects and interaction effects of race and gender. In addition, due to the small Non-Greek sample (49), a two-way factorial ANCOVA was employed controlling for Non-Greek Status to ensure that any significant results were not due to non-Greek influence. Data analysis was completed on only 251 respondents due to missing data. Descriptive statistics consisting of percentage analyses, means and standard deviations were performed.

 Insert Tables 1,2 & 3

The first question investigated was whether there was a significant main effect difference in pledging attitudes due to race. The two-way ANOVA for main effect of race was significant

$F(1,247) = 6.61, p < .01$. The two-way ANCOVA for main effect of race with Greek status covaried out was also significant ($1,247$) $= 10.66, p < .001$.

Attitudes about physical requirements of pledging indicated that 75% of Black students disagreed with this while 94% of White students disagreed. Among Black students, 37% agreed that Pledgees should be required to dress alike, while only six percent of White students agreed. Among White students, four percent agreed that Pledgees should eat the same foods while 16% of Black students agreed. Forty-four percent of Black students agreed that Pledgees should undergo mentally or psychologically challenging activities. In contrast, 16% of White students agreed with that statement. Almost three-fourths (73%) of White students supported the belief that the quality of new members would be worse if pledging was banned, while almost half (47%) of Black students agreed. Forty-eight percent of Black students thought that it was okay to require Pledgees to perform tasks for their Big Brothers/Big Sisters, while 36% of White students agreed. Only about three percent of White students thought that it was necessary for Pledgees to be subservient to Big Brothers/Big Sisters while 21.2% of Black students agreed. Over three-fourths (76%) of Black students thought that Greek organizations are elite organizations, while over half (57%) of White students agreed. Forty-six percent of Black students agreed that an application and interview are sufficient criteria

to be admitted into a Greek organization while 77% of White students agreed.

The second question investigated was whether there was a significant main effect difference in pledging attitudes due to gender. The two-way ANOVA for main effect of gender was significant $F(1, 247) = 24.63, p < .001$. The two-way ANCOVA for main effect of gender with Greek status covaried out also was significant $F(1, 247) = 21.08, p < .001$.

Sixty-five percent of males did not think that individuals should be let into Greek organizations if they desired no pledging, while 42% of females held the same view. While 47% of males thought that joining a Greek organization should be difficult only 25% of females agreed. Twenty-three percent of females thought that Pledgees should undergo mentally or psychologically challenging activities compared to 42% of males agreed. While almost half (49%) of males thought that it was necessary to have an intense process only 35% of women agreed. Fifty-three percent of females agreed that an application and interview are sufficient criteria to be admitted into a Greek organization while 68% of males agreed. While 31% of males reported that they would report pledging activities that were clearly prohibited by law only 11% of females agreed.

The third question investigated was whether there was a significant interaction effect difference in pledging attitudes due to race and gender. The two-way ANOVA for interaction effect

of race and gender was not significant $F(1, 247) = .295, p < .587$. The two-way ANCOVA for interaction effect of race and gender with Greek status covaried out was also not significant $F(1, 247) = .011, p < .918$.

 Insert Tables 4 & 5

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis, that there are no significant differences in attitudes about pledging and hazing based on race, was rejected by this study. The data show that while both Black and White students were not in favor of physical requirements in pledging, Black students were more likely to be in favor of mentally and psychologically challenging activities for Pledges, 44% to 16%, respectively. Although more Black students (21%) than White students (3%) supported the idea of Pledges being subservient, neither group endorsed it strongly. Not surprisingly, Black students were more likely to endorse Pledges dressing alike (36.6%), and to a lesser extent, eating alike (15.7%), than White students (5.9% & 4.2%). The finding that over 75% of Black students feel that Greek organizations are elite organizations seems to be consistent with Kimbrough's (1995) study that showed that 81.5% of Black Greek members see themselves as scholarly, 92.6% see themselves as leaders, and 100% see Black Greek organizations as assets to the campus. The

differences in attitudes between Blacks and Whites may be explained in part to cultural differences in experiences of both groups. There seems to be more emphasis on proving worthiness through tests of mental toughness and acuity in Black Greek organizations than White Greek organizations. The emphasis on mental toughness and acuity might be explained by Blacks valuing human activity focused on inner development more so than Whites (Carter 1990). Also, an adulthood rite for many Black males is the ability to control emotions and the strength to accept taunts and teasing (Harris, 1995; Kunjufu, 1986) while being able to think quickly on one's feet. This cultural frame of reference is often used to justify what might be labeled as hazing activities.

The second hypothesis, that there would be no difference in attitudes between males and females, was not supported by this study. While both males and females generally favor individuals going through a process of proving themselves worthy of the organization, males were more often than females to not favor considering individuals who did not want to pledge but who still wanted to be a part of the organization, 65% to 42%, respectively. As expected, males were more likely than females to believe that joining a Greek organization should be difficult (47%) and that Pledges should undergo mentally or psychologically challenging activities (42%) than females (25% and 23%, respectively.) Surprisingly, females were less likely than males to support the idea of an application and interview

being sufficient criteria to be admitted into a Greek organization (52.9% and 67.7%, respectively). Equally surprising was the finding that more males (31.2%) than females (11.2%) would report pledging activities clearly prohibited by law. These results might be due to female perceptions of the pledge process as being more relational than male perceptions of the pledge process. Activities that constitute pledging may be defined differently for females than for males. It is possible that pledging activities for women are more nurturing than male pledging activities. If this is the case, then it would not be surprising that females would be more opposed to minimum criteria of an application and interview for fear that this would devalue the interpersonal relationships developed as a result of pledging activities. This valuing of interpersonal relationships and rejection of objective criteria would be consistent with the findings of Gilligan (1977, 1982). Overall these results are consistent with the different social-psychological experiences of men and women. Male development tends to place more emphasis on autonomy, separation, and physical competence whereas female development tends to place more emphasis on connectedness, interpersonal relationships, and caring (Gilligan, 1977, 1982).

The third hypothesis, that there would not be a significant interactive effect between race and gender, was supported by the data. While both race and gender exhibited significant main effects, it would appear that race and gender means were not

conditionally ordered. In other words, the rank order of the means indicated that men scored higher women in all circumstances regardless of race.

There are several implications from the data for student affairs professionals. Attitudes about pledging Greek organizations differ based on race and gender. The experiences of gaining membership into Greek organizations differs widely among college students.

In trying to eliminate hazing, administrators and student affairs professionals must be careful not to impose institutional values at the expense of student's cultural values. It is a judicious exercise to ferret out those activities which cause senseless harm to students from those activities which, when properly implemented, facilitate cooperation, personal and civic responsibility, resiliency, and a sense of purpose.

The key to managing pledging while dealing with hazing incidents must include an attitude change at the organizational level (Reese, 1993). Change in behavior must be preceded by a change in attitude. Patterns of misbehavior in the Greek system are symptoms of organizational weakness (Reese, 1993). Student affairs professionals and administrators must work in conjunction with the national Greek organization's leadership to articulate, implement, and regulate organizational mechanisms which promote the psychosocial development of Greek members.

Caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to all college students. Because the sample was not random and consisted primarily of members of Greek organizations, these findings might not reflect the attitudes of nonmembers of Greek organizations. As with all survey research, the problem of social desirability bias is a significant one (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). Respondents may answer items in ways that make them appear to be good people. However, question wording and the lack of a response set with a judgmental tone (e.g. "good" or "bad") should have reduced potentially biased responses.

Continued research using this survey needs to be done to determine if the differences in attitudes detected in this study are valid and reliable. Future studies might consider looking at stages of moral development and attitudes about pledging. An examination of these two areas might reveal a relationship.

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Table 1. Average SAAP Scores and Standard Deviation by Gender

Male	Female
x=3.24	x=2.98
sd=.42	sd=.39

Table 2. Average SAAP Scores and Standard Deviation by Race

Black	White
x=3.14	x=3.05
sd=.42	sd=.43

Table 3. Average SAAP Scores by Race and Gender

	Black	White
Male	x=3.33	x=3.17
Female	x=3.03	x=2.92

Table 4

2-Way ANOVA GENDER BY RACE

Source	DF	Mean	
		Square	F
Main Effects	2	2.66	15.623**
GENDER	1	4.163	25.832**
RACE	1	1.163	7.220*
2-Way Interactions	1	.083	.514
GENDER RACE	1	.083	.514
Explained	3	1.803	11.189**
Residual	247	.161	
Total	250	.181	

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$

Table 5

2-Way ANCOVA GENDER BY RACE

Source	DF	Mean	
		Square	F
Covariates	1	.746	4.698*
STATUS	1	.746	4.698*
Main Effects	2	2.686	16.905**
GENDER	1	3.542	22.294**
RACE	1	1.829	11.515**
2-Way Interactions	1	.014	.09
GENDER RACE	1	.014	.09
Explained	4	1.533	9.650**
Residual	246	.159	
Total	250	.181	

* $p < .03$ ** $p < .001$

Appendix A

Sample items from SAAP Survey

1. It should be difficult to join a Greek organization.
2. Individuals should be required to participate in any physically strenuous activity as a prerequisite to belonging to a Greek organization.
3. Pledgees should be required to dress alike while pledging.
4. It is necessary to have an intense pledge process.
5. It is okay to require Pledgees to perform tasks for their Big Brothers/Big Sisters.
6. Greek organizations are elite organizations.
7. Greek organizations should accept any individual who meets minimum requirements (i.e. grade point average).
8. If I were a member of a Greek organization I would voice concern about any pledging activities that I was not comfortable with.
9. Pledging and hazing are the same behaviors.
10. Pledging is unnecessary and should be banned.

Appendix B

Definition of key words

Fraternity/Sorority: An organization that uses Greek letters for its name and offers lifelong membership

Greek: A member of a fraternity or sorority

Pledgee: A person who is working to become an active member of a fraternity/sorority

Pledge: The process of becoming a member of a fraternity/sorority

Big Brother/Big Sister: A term used by Pledgees when referring to active members of fraternities/sororities